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ABSTRACT

Included in this hearing is the testimony of researchers from governmental agencies and media organizations, representatives of scientific associations, scholars, early childhood educators, and television personalities concerning the effects of televised violence on the behavior of children, adolescents, and adults. Specifically, testimony focuses on (1) observations of the effects of televised violence in children's programs on children's play behaviors and the psychological process through which aggression is learned; (2) responsibility for dealing with televised violence and its effects; (3) behavioral and attitudinal influences of television (its possible antisocial effects) as indicated by a review of selected research studies; (4) the history of research on the relationship between media content and antisocial behavior, the strength of the effect of television's portrayals of violence on viewers, and television networks' internal program review procedures for maintaining appropriate standards of acceptability; (5) major research findings on the impact of televised violence and implications for public policy and audiovisual action; and (6) research indicating that watching televised fantasy violence may reduce real-world violence among male children. (RH)

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A Hearing on Media Violence

Before the

Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice

Committee on the Judiciary

United States Senate

October 25, 1984

10:00 a.m.

226 Dirksen Senate Office Building

Witness List

Panel Consisting of:

Mary Ann Banta, Teacher, University of the District of Columbia, Early Childhood Learning Center, accompanied by her students, Washington, D.C.;

Bob Keeshan, "Captain Kangaroo," New York, New York.

Panel Consisting of:

Dr. David Pearl, Chief of Behavioral Sciences Research, National Institute of Mental Health, Rockville, Maryland;

Philip Harding, Director, Special Projects Research, CBS/Broadcast Group, New York, New York;

Dr. John Murray, Senior Scientist and Director, Youth & Family Policy, The Boys Town Center Urban Program, Boys Town, Nebraska, testifying on behalf of the American Psychological Association;

Dr. Jib Fowles, Professor of Human Sciences and Humanities, University of Houston - Clear Lake, Houston, Texas.

TESTIMONY BEFORE THE UNITED STATES SUBCOMMITTEE ON JUVENILE JUSTICE

October 25, 1984

Mary Ann Banca, M.A.
Teacher, Early Childhood Learning Center of The University of the District of Columbia

I am pleased to have the opportunity to appear before the Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice. I ask that a copy of my testimony be placed in the record.

The relationship between violence on television and aggressive or violent behavior by children who watch those programs has been a long-debated topic. Perhaps it has been long debated because of how the topic is phrased and who is engaged in the discussion.

To date the discussion has been carried on mainly by researchers, by prestigious scholars who only read other people's research and by the broadcast industry spokesmen. I am here to share my experiences as a teacher who has spent the last 20 years, up to eight hours a day, five days a week, in the classroom with children primarily between the ages of three to six. Real world experience

has a place in this debate. I have had the advantage of being able to listen to children's conversations and watch their play in a stable environment over long periods of time.

Before engaging in the discussion it is obligatory to look at the scope of the problem and re-quote the statistics. Some are impressive. 213 billion hours of television were watched in 1983. Over 65% of our population can no longer remember time without television. By the time the average child enters kindergarten, he/she has already spent more hours learning about his world from TV than the hours he would spend in a college classroom earning a B.A. degree. Today's child enters kindergarten with a B.A. in TV. Saturday morning is the most violent time on television. Finally, and I think this is very important, over 70% of what we know is associated with what we have seen.

I am here to tell you that my children have NOT been violent, nor are they, for the most part, even very aggressive.

I cannot say the same about the uninvited and unenrolled characters who have also populated my classroom. The list includes Bat Man, Spiderman, Wonder Woman, Superman, Kung Fu, Evil Knevil, The Duke Boys, The Hulk, The Smurfs, Mr. T, He-Man and Aqua Dog. They are not necessarily lacking in aggressiveness and nonviolence.

Understand this about young children: an essential tool of their learning is imitating the behavior of those around them. Children learn by imitation and they practice their imitation in their play. Imitation and play are essential to their development and to learning.

It is through the children's play that the assortment of television characters invade my classroom and every other classroom where children are free to play. It is because of the nature of the characters who populate children's television that the children's play can become aggressive and even violent and I, an innocent bystander, become a victim of television violence. Consequently, a portion of my teaching time is spent combating an unnatural aggressiveness in my children's play.

Now there are those who say that children have always been aggressive. Of course. Imitative behavior is age old. The difference is that the behavior is now reinforced again and again by the visual image of television.

As a result of Bat Man, I had to deal with POW! BAM! and imaginary hits that sometimes were not imaginary to the receiver. Young children have a well known, natural tendency to climb but Spiderman suggested that they climb straight up walls. Wonder Woman brought equality of the sexes with girls spinning around and leaping up to and down on imaginary and not so imaginary foes. Superman encourages bodies to fly, while Kung Fu had feet flying into faces.

Aqua Dog was one of my favorites. The children were swimming imaginary waters while snarling, barking and growling. In retrospect Evil Knevil wasn't so bad. Cars were neatly lined up, ramps were built and then with great fanfare, the jump was made. Evil Knevil was followed by, what appeared to me to be the needless and uncalled for disintegration of solid wooden cars. These cars had lasted for years and seemed destined to outlast me. Why had

the children's relatively good driving habits suddenly disappeared? My team teacher answered the question with "The Dukes of Hazzard." I was forced to introduce into the block corner the concept of sensible driving, losing driving license and impounding of cars.

Each fall I wait with eager anticipation "The New Fall Lineup." What defensive tactics am I going to have to develop this year to counter the new activities of the latest heroes?

But what happens to the children? As they get older, the habit of watching, replicating and imitating is well established. The problem of adolescent violence is that the violence is real, not imaginary.

Researchers, broadcasters and government officials may have difficulty in deciding if children learn behavior from what they view on television, but a teacher who carefully observes behavior over a period of years can easily see the effects of television on her young students.

Why is it that mothers, teachers, child psychiatrists who actually treat children and some pediatricians see the link between television and their children's behavior? Perhaps it is the way the question is stated: "Study Links TV Viewing, Aggression" or "Study found no evidence that television violence was causally related to the development of aggressive behavior patterns."

Think about the words used: "violence," "aggression." These are words that evoke strong feelings. They wave a red flag. The words allow people to take positions that appear on the surface to be reasonable. These words move the issue into the theater where the television industry is most comfortable, that of body counts, crisis, disaster, horror, murder and mayhem. Just as the television industry chooses to emphasize aggression, violence and action/adventure, much of the research emphasis is centered on aggressive vs. non-aggressive behavior. The fact is that television affects HOW EVERYONE ACTS.

While it is relatively easy for me to chronicle the characters who have introduced unwelcomed and unacceptable

behavior, it is far more difficult to pinpoint the positive behaviors children have learned from television. They are there.

If television doesn't influence behavior, why are the broadcasters selling time in bits and pieces. What is a minute worth during the Super Bowl? What is a minute worth on Saturday Morning? Why, for that matter, do politicians buy time just before elections?

REMEDIES

Many remedies can be suggested. My favorite is to help children develop critical viewing skills. Education is the child's first line of defense. Children must know what television can and cannot do to them and for them. They need to understand television violence. This can best be done on television itself. The broadcast industry creates problems in my classroom, it creates problems for children, for parents and for society. These problems must be solved and solved with the television industry's active participation. Critical viewing skills can best be taught on television. If you cause the problem, be part of the solution.

Obviously there are many other partial solutions to the problem. Taken together they may diminish the negative and accentuate the positive effects of television. But first, before this can happen, we must admit and accept that television affects EVERYONE's behavior. Having admitted this, we can then productively discuss a national policy on television for children.

TESTIMONY

of

ROBERT J. KEESHAN

COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

UNITED STATES SENATE

October 25, 1984

Washington, D. C.

The most basic undertaking of any society is the nurturing of its young. This springs from the instinct for survival, a strong instinct in the individual and a strong instinct in society. A society which intelligently attends to the nurturing of its young has a promising future; the society which fails in this basic task will spend its resources restraining its misfits and building detention centers to warehouse its failures.

To be successful in the nurturing process society must be concerned about the many influences affecting the development of its young. The family, our primary unit for nurturing, must have the support of the total society if it is to perform its task. We must provide for the education of the young through the institutions dedicated to that purpose and we must calculate the effects of other segments of society on the development of our children. All of us in society must weigh how our private actions and our public and corporate policies affect the youth of the nation, its future.

Television is an influence on our young people. It provides a wide range of experiences, it provides more information, for most children, than the public library, for some children television provides more information than the schools. Television influences our young in developing attitudes and is one of the nation's most powerful forces in the imparting of values to young people from toddler to teen and beyond.

Many leaders in our society have called upon broadcasters to recognize the impact of the total of their programming on the nation's youth and to accept responsibility for the effects of their products upon our young people. I believe that broadcasters, commercial and public, network and independent, must appreciate the impact of their programming on the nation's young people and, therefore, on the future of the republic.This is not a responsibility which we assign to broadcasters and not to others. I believe every segment of our society, government, industry, business, including broadcasters, must be accountable for the effects of their actions upon the nation's young. The question is not whether broadcasters be treated as trustees of the airwaves, or as private enterprise in a public business. Every one of us, individual or corporation, public or private, is subject to the principle of accountability. As an automobile manufacturer is held accountable for the safety of his products so must a broadcaster be held accountable for the safety of his products. Children <u>are</u> special and if we are to nurture our young and provide for our future we must recognize the special conditions which obtain.

Having said that, I must also say that I would be distressed if the question of any connection between media violence and aggression in children was to be addressed as simply a question of broadcaster responsibility. It is far from being a simple question. The journalist, H. L. Mencken, told us that "to every <u>complex</u> question there is a <u>simple</u> answer, and it is wrong!" There are many forces in a child's life determining how

television is used by that child. How do we inform parents that each child brings a special range of experience to a television program and may be affected in a quite different way than another child, even another child of the same age? We must educate parents so that they may realize that values are imparted to a child through television viewing and that programs must be as carefully selected as real-life friends and as carefully screened as other influences upon the child.

Perhaps the greatest danger in media violence results from what I call the immunization factor. A steady diet of television viewing exposes our young people to considerable violence, dramatic violence, some of it gratuitous but much of it appropriate to the dramatic portrayal, and real-life violence, as in the television news. This diet of violence has, in my opinion, created an immunity to the horror of violence in a nation of viewers over the last quarter-century. Our young people, whose view of the world is most influenced by television viewing, may have come to believe that violence is a more casual part of life than it in fact is, and accept violence and its effects as a part of our culture. The young child may even come to believe that the use of violence is justified in problem solving. It is a difficult lesson to unlearn; many never succeed in that "unlearning" process.

If we have become immune to the horrors of violence, if we accept vicarious violent experiences, we may come to accept the real thing with ease. Our nightmares will then inhabit our days.

I believe these to be proper concerns for an enlightened society. The safety of our children will affect the quality of our future. As the psychologist, Alberta Seigel, has said, "we have twenty years to save civilization, the time it takes to raise a generation." We begin the next twenty years with our concern today.

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

Public Health Service

Alcohol, Drug Abuse, and
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Testimony of

David Pearl, Ph.D.
Chief, Behavioral Sciences Research Branch
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National Institute of Mental Health

before the

Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice of the
Senate Committee on the Judiciary

October 25, 1984

Television - Behavioral and Attitudinal Influences

By David Pearl, Ph.D.
National Institute of Mental Health

From its early days, television has increasingly become an important part of the life of the viewing public, including children. Television is now a socializing agent almost comparable in importance to the home, school and neighborhood in influencing children's development and behaviors. Practically every American home has a television set; many have multiple sets. The medium is a formidable educator whose effects are both pervasive and cumulative. Research findings have long since destroyed any illusion that television is merely innocuous entertainment and it can no longer be considered as a mere casual part of daily life.

A survey of a few months ago indicated that the average household had a television set on for 49 hours a week, up from what previously had been believed. Surveys also have indicated that each person, on the average, watches television for approximately 25-30 hours per week. Some, of course, watch much more. Viewing times for individuals may range from one or two to many hours daily and some keep the set on all day long. Children, women, older persons, and those in the lower socioeconomic strata of society view the most. A study last year of the viewing habits of black school aged boys revealed that the average viewing time was an astonishing 44 hours per week.[1] Another survey has found that for large numbers of people television ranked third among all activities (after sleep and

work) in the number of hours devoted to it. The average American child, 9-12 years of age, will spend approximately 1000 hours in the classroom over a year but will spend 1340 hours before a TV set. By the time an average child graduates high school, he will have spent 22,000 hours of accumulated viewing time before the television screen and only 11,000 hours of classroom time. The 1982 Nielsen report on television estimates that by the age of 16, a young person will have seen 18,000 murders on television.

Public interest and concern about the effects on children and youth of televised violence began to be manifested in the 1950s. Two governmental commissions considered this problem in the late 1960s. The first,[2] the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence concluded that the viewing of televised violence increased the liklihood of a viewer to behave violently, this on the basis of a relatively small number of laboratory studies. The second commission was the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee, set up in 1969. After commissioning new research, the Committee in a widely publicized report in 1972 confirmed the pervasiveness of television. Its major conclusion was that there was fairly substantial experimental evidence for a short-run causation of aggression among some children viewing televised violence and less evidence from field studies regarding long term causal effects.[3]

Since then, a large number of studies on the medium's influence were conducted on a broad range of behavioral topics. Over 80 percent of all publications of research on television influences have appeared in the last decade--over 2,500 titles.

Most of these did not focus on violence but dealt with other potential of the medium effects. Because of the outpouring of research, leading investigators in 1979 suggested the timeliness of an update of the 1972 Surgeon General's Report through an assessment and integration of this burgeoning literature. The Surgeon General and the National Institute of Mental Health agreed and the project was initiated in late 1979. The update was conducted by key NIMH staff together with a small distinguished advisory group. These included child development experts, behavioral scientists, mental health researchers and communication media specialists. Comprehensive and critical evaluations of the scientific literature were commissioned from leading researchers. The update group then assessed and integrated these contributions as well as additional pertinent data. The import of the group's evaluations as well as the commissioned state of knowledge articles were incorporated in a two volume report which was published in 1982.[4,5] Only a part of the report is given over to considerations of televised violence and potential influences on viewers. The major part of the report covers such other considerations as television's health promoting possibilities and such other aspects as: cognitive and emotional influences, prosocial or socially desirable behaviors, creativity and fantasy, socialization and conceptions of social reality, television and the family, educational achievement, and critical television viewing skills.

The unanimous consensus of the NIMH update group was that there is a general learning effect from television viewing which

is important in the development and functioning of many viewers, particularly children. Viewers can be influenced by the programs they watch in socially desirable ways as well as in dysfunctional behaviors. This general learning influence, of course, has been implicitly subscribed to by the broadcast industry with respect to the effectiveness of television advertising.

Most learning is incidental and derives from the watching of television entertainment programs, particularly dramatic shows. Television programs deliver messages to children, and others, about the nature of their world. The medium provides them with ideas about the way people are, how they live, believe, and interact. It gives children a framework for expectations--what to expect from others and themselves. It expands their horizons by bringing them into symbolic contact with people and situations that are unfamiliar to them. Television provides models through whom children learn about role behaviors and what to expect regarding such social and behavioral aspects as friendship, cross-sex relationships, marriage, goals and aspirations, achievement, the school place, work. It also suggests what works in the real world. Through program plots and characters, it portrays problems and conflicts, reveals how these are solved and how motivations are satisfied.

While the medium has a prosocial potential, the learning and expression of aggressive behaviors or attitudes on these, currently are major aspects of its influence. The Update Group agreed unanimously that, on balance, the convergence of findings from a sizeable number of studies supported the inference of a

causal connection between the viewing of televised violence and later aggressive behavior. The conclusions reached in the 1972 Surgeon General's Report were judged to have been strengthened by the more recent research and the processes by which aggressive behavior is produced were clarified further by such studies. The NIMH update group also concluded that television's influence or effects on aggressive behaviors are not attributable solely to its programmatic content but may, in part, be due also to the structure or form of the medium. This includes such aspects as program pace, action level, and camera effects which stimulate higher physiological and emotional arousal levels in the viewer, and thus a greater readiness to respond aggressively under appropriate instigation or cues.

The data are derived from both experimental and naturalistic field studies. In common with experimental research, the great majority of observational or field studies and surveys indicate also that there is a significant positive correlation between television viewing and a variety of behavioral influences including that of aggressive behaviors. The strength of this relationship as clarified by correlational, regression and structural equation analyses differs between field studies on the basis of differences in subject samples and procedures for assessing both viewing and aggressive behaviors. Some of the studies deal with community effects of the introduction of television, others involve longitudinal followups over time; some make cross-cultural comparisons. But there can be little doubt that experimental and field findings coalesce and indicate a

plausible causal relationship between the viewing of televised violence and subsequent aggressive behaviors.

Several of the earlier studies, prior to 1972, reported data indicating that it was viewer preference for television action programs involving violence which was causally linked to later aggressiveness. More recent research, however, has pointed to the critical relationship between the extent of television viewing of violent programming and aggressive behavior rather than to the attitudinal preference for such programs. Thus heavy viewers of such programs can be influenced even though they do not start out with a previous preference for violent portrayals. Recent coordinated cross-national longitudinal studies[6] also have shown that this effect does not occur only for those who initially were the most aggressive. The data indicate that attitudes and preferences are subsequently affected. Children who were influenced to become more aggressive then tended to develop an increased interest and preference for programs with violence.

Such empirical support for the linkage does not mean, of course, that all aggressive or violent behaviors in the real world are influenced by television. Some critics of the NIMH Report findings have misunderstood this. The causes of behavior are complex and are determined by multiple factors. The viewing of televised violence is only one in a constellation of determinants or precipitating factors involved in antisocial or aggressive behavior. Probably no single factor by itself makes a person seriously aggressive or antisocial. And certainly, under

some psychological, social or environmental circumstances, television may exert little or no easily discernible influence on behavior. But with other conditions, it may play a significant role in shaping behavioral style, when, and how violence, aggressiveness or other antisocial behavior gets expressed. Television viewing also may function as a triggering or releasing mechanism for overt behaviors which otherwise might be inhibited.

Some critics also have discounted the antisocial effects shown by past research on the grounds that such effects or relationships while statistically significant nevertheless are not large enough to be meaningful in a practical sense. But even if it were so, that the extensive watching of televised violence had only a comparatively small overall effect on viewers, that effect could still be of major social significance. Consider the situation if even only one out of a thousand viewing children or youth were affected (there may well be a higher rate). A given prime time national program whose audience includes millions of children and adolescents would generate a group of thousands of youngsters who were influenced in some way. Consider also the cumulative effects for viewers who watch such programs throughout the year. Even if only a small number of antisocial incidents are precipitated in any community, these often may be sufficient to be disruptive and to impair the quality of life for citizens of that community.

Furthermore, we know that television presentations of various antisocial or violent acts have instigated imitations or what some have called "copy-cat" behaviors. This has occurred

for airplane hijacking, and more recently, in an increase of poison threats involving tampering with over-the-counter drugs. Documentary or semi-fictional presentations, as well as fictional dramatic programs and movies on television, have stimulated imitations of antisocial acts or threats of violence. One documented illustration [7] involves reports by airlines in various cities and countries on extortion threats to blow up aircraft through an already implanted pressure sensitive bomb. These were imitative threats which systematically and quickly followed the showing of the television play, "Doomsday Flight," in these cities at different times. Prior to the showing of this television drama which involved a similar plot, there had been no extortion threats of this kind in any of these communities. Numerous self-inflicted deaths and woundings involving both adults and adolescents also have ben reported all over the country at different times following the showing in the victims' communities of the movie on television of the "Deerhunter." This has a prominent "Russian Roulette" episode.

And just this past week we read and heard about the grisly news story of the man who doused his wife with gasolene and set her on fire after he had seen the television movie, "The Burning Bed."[8] This portrayed a long abused battered wife who finally dealt with her spouse by setting his bed and him afire with gasolene while he slept. Now I do not want to imply that television programs necessarily should be completely sanitized in an abstract fashion from all aggressive or violent elements. This would be unrealistic. But this story illustrates again the

extraordinary behavioral and psychological influence the medium can have. In this instance, some other aspects of the dramatic portrayal could be considered as positive in that the real problem of spouse abuse was publicized and some viewers were led to inquire of community agencies about counseling for themselves.

Some critics have also criticized research studies as revealing only that the frequent viewing of televised violence merely instigates incivility rather than dangerous aggressiveness or violence. This, however, selectively ignores particular studies or various developmental considerations. When young children are studied for television's influences, one does not expect immediately to find major effects that can be classified as dangerously aggressive or violent. The developmental stages of such children and their often restricted environmental opportunities initially set limits on the acting out engaged in. The increased interpersonal and object oriented aggressiveness that some studies have reported, though less than immediately violent, does have implications for future behaviors. Data now exist that show that certain aggressive or deviant acts in early childhood or early adolescence are related to later-in-life antisocial behaviors and that the more aggressive school boys tend to become the more aggressive and antisocial youths and young adults.

There also are several studies which do link the heavy viewing of televised violent programs to violent and antisocial behaviors. Two will serve to illustrate. In a noteworthy study by Belson[9] 1,650 London teenage boys were evaluated through

interview data for violent behavior attitudes, background and exposure to television violence. They were divided into two groups on the basis of the extent of violence viewing, equated on certain variables, and then compared. Belson reported strong evidence that heavy television viewing increased the degree to which boys engaged in serious violent behaviors such as burglary, property destruction, infliction of personal injuries, attempted rape, etc.

The second study is longitudinal and has been engaged in by Eron and his colleagues.[10] Subjects, first seen in 1960, included the entire third grade of a New York State county. They were seen in classrooms for a series of tests and questionnaires. Personal interviews were also conducted with parents to determine learning conditions in the home which would relate to aggression of children in school as rated by peers. In 1970, subjects now about 19 years old were again interviewed and retested. The best single prediction of aggressiveness at 19 years of age turned out to be the violence of the television programs the subjects preferred when they were eight years old. This finding was a major basis for the conclusion in 1972 by the Surgeon General's Scientific Advisory Committee that televised violence seemed causally linked to children's aggressiveness.[11] A third phase of Eron's study has now been completed. Over 300 of the subjects were reinterviewed ten years later in 1980 at age 30. Measures of psychopathology as well as interpersonal skills, competence and television habits were given. Hospital and criminal justice data were gathered. Spouses and children of the

original subjects also were interviewed. Dr. Eron's analyses indicate that the peer rated aggressiveness or acting out behaviors at age 8 do predict over 22 years to the number and seriousness of criminal arrests, number of traffic accidents and moving violations, convictions for driving while impaired, and extent of spouse abuse. The data also show that the violence of preferred television programs at age 8 continued to be an important variable, being correlated significantly with subjects' self ratings of aggression, alcohol use, and with several of the above public record violations.[12]

Four kinds of television related effects can be identified. The first involves the direct imitation of observed violence. This is the effect that first springs to mind when one thinks about television violence. There are many examples of the learning and overt imitations of viewed violent or aggressive actions. The medium often has provided tutoring or training on how to do it--how to burglarize, physically manhandle an opponent, and so forth.

A second type of effect occurs when the television violence serves to instigate or trigger off overt acts which are not imitations of what had been immediately observed but rather relate to earlier learned aggressive or violent tactics.

The other two effects concern the psychological effects on viewers of a diet of heavy watching of televised violence. These influences are subtle and insidious and should be of concern.

Viewer habituation or desensitization to the occurrence of violence is one of these two potential outcomes. Children

especially, but youth and adults too, may learn that violent behavior or aggressive tactics are appropriate under many circumstances. Some who spend significant amounts of time watching programs with high action, violence and antisocial behaviors may begin to assume that these are reflective of a similar rate of such occurrences in the world. Such viewers would learn gradually to accept a higher level of violent or antisocial behavior as being normal. A number of studies with children[e.g.,13,14] have provided data which suggest that the development of this frame of mind or attitude may result in a greater tolerance of violence when it occurs, a decrease of empathy toward others in distress, or an increase in apathy relative to the helping of victims. A number of recent studies with adults provide a clear indication of how exposure to films may influence attitudes of greater acceptance of violence against women. Zilmann and Bryant [15] have found from an experimental study that the more extensive the viewing of erotic films, the more significantly affected are the attitudes of viewers on sexuality and dispositions toward women. Viewers of such films, in contrast to comparable control subjects, became more calloused and less compassionate to hypothetical rape victims. Extensive viewing of these erotic films trivialized and shifted attitudes so that rape became perceived as a less serious crime.

Studies by Donnerstein[16] and Malamuth[17] concerned the effects of films on viewers. Donnerstein found no increase in violent or sexually violent attitudes by men toward women when a neutral or an explicitly sexual film was shown. But both a

violent film and even more so a sexually violent film resulted in a considerable increase in viewer willingness to administer pain to women and to report an increased likelihood of raping a woman. Malamuth, on the basis of several studies, concluded that violent, non-sexual films of the kind often appearing on television did increase the acceptance of aggression against women.

The fourth type of influence involves the impact of televised violence or antisocial acts on viewer fearfulness. There is considerable evidence that the medium is influential in the learning of behaviors other than aggression and in the shaping of viewer knowledge and attitudes. As one aspect, children along with other viewers may learn to identify with portrayed victims of televised violence. The violence profiles issued yearly by Dr. George Gerbner and his colleagues[18,19] have indicated that a disproportionate percentage of television-portrayed victims are the powerless or have-not individuals in our society, including children and older citizens. Viewers then may experience fear and apprehension on the basis of identification or perceived similarity to such victims. Gerbner has reported generally that heavy viewers, as contrasted to light viewers, tend to overestimate the amount of violence and danger facing them To the extent that this is a valid finding, it should have pertinence for many viewers, particulary the elderly. Surveys typically indicate that older persons are heavy users of television for entertainment, as time markers, and for contact with what is going on in the world. This, in large

measure, is due to their decreased physical mobility and to their often restricted incomes. Crime statistics reveal that there is a realistic basis for anxiety concerning possible victimization for large numbers of older citizens in cities, many living marginally. Television programming which exacerbates expectations of violence and trauma thus could be considered as having unwanted mental health effects such as heightening anxiety over being victimized and increasing the fear of being away from one's home. With a growing number of elderly in our population, such effects increasingly will demand attention.

A number of studies, mostly experimental, have delineated those viewing circumstances where televised violence was most likely to influence behavior. Aggressiveness is most likely to be emulated when:

(1) it pays off: that is, the actor or model solve his problem, achieves his goal, or satisfies his need;

(2) it is not punished: there is no retribution, censure, or unfavorable consequence to the actor as a result of the use of violence;

(3) it is shown in a justifying context; that is, the violence, threat or injury meted out is justified by the events and the victim merited such behavior. This typically characterizes police shows;

(4) it is socially acceptable: the aggressive behaviors are presented as acceptable to the portrayed TV players in the context of the social practices and attitudes characterizing the setting and plot of the program. An example would be the hanging of a rustler in a wild west program;

(5) it appears realistic rather than being seen as a segment of a fictitious program;

(6) it appears motivated by a deliberate intent to injure the victim;

(7) it is expressed under conditions, cues, or circumstances similar to those experienced or lived in by the viewer; and,

(8) it is perpetrated by a model who the viewer perceives as similar to himself.

Just as media influenced behaviors can be facilitated, there also are aspects which frequently serve to inhibit acting out.

(1) retribution and punishment following violence--a clear indicator that crime does not pay;

(2) a sequential showing of the destructive, painful, and often enduring consequences of aggression; and

(3) reminders that such behaviors are contrary to ethical or moral principles.

A number of field studies of the last decade involving children and youth deserve special attention. Some have been completed since the 1982 NIMH Report. The Eron et al. longitudinal study, mentioned earlier,[10,11,12] has been a key study. Singer and Singer[20] in two short-term longitudinal studies followed middle-class and lower-socioeconomic class three and four year olds and asessed both their television viewing and behavior at four different times. Multivariate analyses led the researchers to conclude in both studies that watching violence on television was a cause of heightened aggressiveness. Longitudinal followups of these children continued to show the same relationship three to four years later.[21]

McCarthy and colleagues in 1975[22] came to the same conclusion as a result of a five-year study of 732 children. Several kinds of aggressive behaviors, including conflict with parents, fighting, and delinquency proved positively associated with amount of television viewing.

Greenberg in 1975[23] found correlations between violence viewing and aggressive behaviors in a sample of London school children to be very similar to those reported for American children.

In a Canadian study reported by Williams,[24] aggressive behaviors of primary school children in a small community were assessed before and after television was introduced. These data were compared with that for children of two other towns which already had access to television. Increases in both verbal and physical aggression occurred after television was introduced and were significantly greater here than in the two comparison communities.

Huesmann, Lagerspetz and Eron[6] collected data on 758 first and third grades for each of 3 years through an overlapping longitudinal design which then provided data for grades 2 to 5. Similar data was collected on 220 children in Finland. Analyses revealed that violence viewing was related to concurrent aggression and significantly predicted aggression levels several years later for boys in both countries and for girls in the United States. Both the frequency with which violence was viewed and the extent of violence in the programs watched contributed to the causal relationship.

A further study by Huesmann and colleagues[25] involved 169 first and third grade children who had a high exposure to television violence. Experimental techniques aimed at changing children's attitudes about the realism of television violence and whether watching television violence was harmful resulted in a significant reduction in the propensity of these children to act aggressively. This did not occur for similar children who did not receive these interventions. The investigators conclude that the success of these interventions could not have occurred if the violence viewing-aggression causal relationships were spurious or due to some third factor.

Adolescents were the subjects of a study reported by Hartnagel, Teevan, and McIntyre.[26] In this, they found a signficant though low correlation between violence viewing and aggressive behaviors.

Reference has been made earlier to the study by Belson of 1,650 London youth.[9,27] Belson reported that boys with heavy exposure to televised violence were 47 percent more likely than boys with light exposure to commit acts such as burglary, property destruction, personal injury and rape and were eleven percent more likely to commit violent acts in general. The reverse hypothesis that violent boys were more likely to watch violent television programs was tested and did not hold up. Belson also found that the viewing of certain program types seemed more likely than others to lead to serious behavioral offenses. These included programs involving physical or visual violence in close personal relationships, programs with

gratuitous violence not germane to the plot, realistic fictional violence, violence in a good cause, and violent westerns.

In striking contrast, Milavsky and his colleagues in a National Broadcasting Company panel study[28] concluded differently. They collected data at several points of time over a 3 year period for 2,400 elementary school children and from 800 teenage high school boys in two cities. Peer nominations of aggression were collected for the elementary school children while the teenagers gave self reports. The results obtained through the use of a recently developed model for causal analysis (Lisrel IV computer program) showed that there were short-term small positive correlations between viewing measures and aggressive behavior taken at the same point of time. They did not find any long-term effects and they concluded that short-term effects did not cumulate and produce stable patterns of aggressive behavior in the real world.

The seeming excellence of this study's data and analysis would seem to pose a serious challenge to the conclusions of the NIMH report regarding a causal influence. However, this study was considered by the NIMH update group which concluded unanimously that, on balance, the research evidence supported the causal inference. The fact that a negative finding regarding the existence of a phenomenon or a relationship customarily is accorded less weight than are positive findings was a consideration--assuming that the studies generating positive findings were well designed and rigorous. Logically, one cannot definitively prove the "null hypothesis." There may be various

reasons for a study's negative finding other than the non-existence of what is being studied. Indeed, the full appropriateness of the analytical model used in this study has been questioned. A reanalysis by Cook[29] led him to conclude that the NBC study conclusions were faulty and that a more tenable conclusion from the data was that television violence may well increase aggression, along with other factors, in children from 7 to 16 years of age. Several other methodologists have made the same point.

A recently published study[30] involving a different approach provides an additional finding which is consistent with the thesis that television is a potent influence on viewer behaviors. This study used interrupted time series data to examine how the introduction of television in American cities at different times affected FBI crime indicators. The research was possible because television reception by communities throughout the country began at different times. This artificial staggering resulted from a Federal Communications Commission freeze on new broadcasting licenses between late 1949 and mid-1950. Areas receiving television before the freeze could then be compared at different times for levels of crime with communities only provided television after the freeze. Sophisticated analyses did not reveal a consistent effect for all crimes but did show that the introduction of television conclusively increased larcenies and less definitively, auto thefts. The authors believed that these increases were probably largely due to attitudinal and motivational changes. Their analysis of early television

programming indicated that these were most likely due to the arousal of consumption appetities for many young viewers by the portrayal of middle class life styles and the heavy advertising of consumption goods.

A caveat is in order as I conclude this sampling of important research studies. The research evidence is based on studies of groups and does not permit one at this time to make a definitive prediction that a particular individual is violence prone or anti-social just on the basis of heavy viewing of televised violence. As indicated earlier, behaviors are complex and multidetermined. Television influences are important but there are other potential influences at work. Whether a particular heavy television viewer will act aggressively or be antisocial will also depend on other aspects of his background and the existence of environmental instigators or restraints on his acting out. The extensive watching of televised violence has significant influences on many viewers and is important, but yet, is only one of several factors in the equation.

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BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE ON JUVENILE JUSTICE OF THE
SENATE COMMITTEE ON THE JUDICIARY

Statement by Philip A. Harding

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October 25, 1984

My name is Philip Harding, and I am Vice President, Office of Social and Policy Research in the CBS/Broadcast Group.

We at CBS welcome the opportunity to participate in this morning's discussion of an issue which has been the topic of considerable debate for more than 30 years: The extent to which depictions of violence in television entertainment programs may contribute to violent or otherwise anti-social behavior in the real world.

In the 15 years since I joined CBS, my work has been directly concerned with questions of television's social effects. And I have often observed during that time that such questions have generally been approached at two quite different levels. The first is the level of opinion, where the positions advanced are not based in any rigorous sense upon facts.

There is, however, a second, more scientific level from which one can address questions of this nature. The approach here is in terms of that which is empirically observable and measurable. And if there is not yet sufficient factual evidence on which to base valid conclusions, we recognize that and continue to apply the tools of disciplined research inquiry.

Given a choice between these two levels -- opinion on the one hand and objective empirical inquiry on the other -- most of us, I'm sure, would opt for the second in approaching issues as complex as television's effects on behavior.

It's worth keeping in mind that questions as to the relationship between media content and anti-social behavior are by no means new. Half a century ago, in the 1930's, the Payne Fund was supporting research on whether movies influenced their teenaged audiences to engage in criminal behavior. In the intervening years, comic books and even radio programming became the subjects of similar inquiries. With the arrival of television, the focus shifted again: In the past 20 years, CBS has been represented at some seven Senate or House hearings held to explore whether television might be causally implicated in real-world violence.

There is, then, a considerable history to this issue. Television, like the earlier media which were the subjects of similar concerns,

does of course deal with crime and violence -- both in its journalistic and entertainment functions. But I would submit that there has been very little scientific research which has meaningfully addressed the social consequences of such depictions.

Let me elaborate. The fundamental question before us is whether television's portrayals of violence are likely to induce in viewers a greater likelihood of themselves engaging in violent or other forms of seriously anti-social behavior. What must be clearly understood, however, is that the word adopted for the discussion by much of the scientific community is "aggression" and not "violence." And it is aggression, not violence, that the great mass of the studies have sought to measure.

The reason for this is pragmatic. As Krattenmaker and Powe observed several years ago in the Virginia Law Review:

> A normative definition of violence agreeable to all and fairly objectively determinable can be derived: the purposeful, illegal infliction of pain for personal gain or gratification that is intended to harm the victim and is accomplished in spite of social sanctions against it. Whether viewing such behavior simulated on television tends to cause its occurrence in real life seems to be the question about which researchers, regulators, and the public care. Such violence, however, is precisely the sort of behavior that no researcher in a laboratory may seek to cause and that no "real world observer" can hope to witness systematically.

The fact that so much of the research literature bears upon aggression rather than violence has been emphasized by us and by other observers who have questioned the social importance of the behaviors studied. Some critics of the research, including ourselves, go further and ask whether many of these behaviors are even "aggressive" in any destructive or hurtful sense. By way of example, one of the studies has as its subjects nursery-school children whose behavior was observed and rated during free-play periods. To the extent that this study turned up any behaviors its authors considered aggressive, these were limited very largely to instances in which a child may have carelessly knocked into other children's toys or disrupted games. Another study considers it aggressive for third-grade children to stick their tongues out or scowl. Dr. Thomas Cook and his colleagues at Northwestern University, in a published evaluation of the 1982 NIMH report Television and Behavior, has suggested that many of the aggression measures are not clearly related to any anti-social behavior. He notes that "[m]any readers understand 'aggression' in terms of physical violence with intent to harm or as criminal behavior, and not as the "incivility' that the majority of past measures of aggression mostly tap into."

I have no wish to review all the behaviors measured in all of the studies. But I think we can agree that, while some of these behaviors do represent some form of aggression, we must always recognize that very few of them could be meaningfully characterized as violent.

And if so few of the available studies have dealt with violence, even fewer have focused on real-life crime. In short, then, the types of behavior measured in so much of the research on this question simply do not enable us to reach a scholarly conclusion as to whether violence on television leads to crime or violence in the real world.

In my statement this morning, I have argued for the use of rigorously objective and valid research as the most fruitful approach to questions of television's social effects. In addition, I have expressed my own position and that of CBS that the research done to date has simply failed to implicate television as a contributing influence in socially-meaningful acts of crime and violence. But how does all of this reconcile with the occasional but tragic instances in which acts of violence committed in real life appear to be directly imitative of, or at least modeled upon, content presented on television? Or, for that matter, content presented in motion pictures or the print media?

First of all, it won't do to deny that such things have happened -- happened rarely, when one considers the many millions of persons exposed to the same media content who did not engage in such behavior, but happened nonetheless. My background is social psychology, not criminology and not psychiatry. But my own interpretation of this so-called "copycat violence" is that there exists among certain individuals a level of emotional pathology

which, given the appropriate trigger, necessarily manifests itself in violent and destructive ways. To the extent this trigger is an external one, it might be literally anything in the disturbed individual's environment.

That would include, but certainly not be limited to, the content of television, movies, books, newspapers, or any other medium. But because we are dealing in these tragic cases with what is essentially an irrational and idiosyncratic process, there is to my knowledge little that helps us to identify in advance what aspects of theme, visual content, characterization, and so forth might be considered risk factors. But even if there were, I cannot believe that the rage and self-hatred that are so often the root causes of these destructive acts would not still become violently manifest in any case.

I want to point out that there is a unit of the CBS Broadcast Group which is responsible for maintaining standards of taste and overall suitability in all of the entertainment programming and commercial advertising carried on the CBS Television Network. This is the Program Practices Department, whose total staff of 80 is distributed between Los Angeles and New York. These are trained, experienced professionals who continually evaluate the content of our broadcasts to ensure the maintenance of appropriate standards of acceptability.

It has long been our practice that before we acquire new series, theatrical and made-for-television motion pictures, mini-series or any other programming, Program Practices must first approve the dramatic treatment of their respective themes. Once such programming is on the schedule, the Department reviews each story outline or script in terms, first, of acceptability of overall theme, and then individual scenes and script dialogues. Where revisions are required, these are conveyed both to the production company and to our CBS Entertainment Division people in Hollywood.

I am of course not a member of the Program Practices staff and so am not prepared to explain the review process in detail. As regards its application to portrayals of violence, however, I am aware that a basic distinction is made between violence judged to be necessary to the development of the program's characters or plot and acts which are plainly gratuitous and serve no such function. In the latter case, more moderate alternatives are negotiated with the creative people and substituted for the material originally judged unsuitable.

The process is different for different programs and is to a large extent determined by the unique set of character and storyline expectations that individual series have engendered among their audiences. This is why no single set of standards, no written guidelines, could be applied across the board.

Let me close with a few general observations. While the causes of crime and violence in our society are complex, we may all agree that among the major contributing factors are a variety of deeply-rooted social conditions. Those conditions, however, are notoriously difficult to eradicate. It therefore becomes all too easy to point the finger of blame elsewhere -- frequently at the media and particularly at television. CBS believes, however, that after years of hearings and official government reports, there is still no convincing evidence that television violence creates criminals or increases crime in our society.

The lack of such evidence makes it all the more imperative that our concerns about societal violence not lead us to actions aimed at narrowing the freedoms of expression we have so long enjoyed. Crime and violence appear in the media -- both in the form of dramatic entertainment and in our daily newspapers and news broadcasts -- for the simple reason that they are part of the world in which we live. It is difficult to imagine any role for the government in this area which would not be fundamentally at odds with our traditional freedoms of speech and press.

Those are issues, however, which can be better discussed by others. What I have tried to suggest to you today is that the social effects of media content is an area of enormous complexity, and we are still far from fully understanding it.

American
Psychological
Association

TESTIMONY OF

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The Boys Town Urban Program

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on behalf of

THE AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

before the

UNITED STATES SENATE

Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice

Committee on the Judiciary

October 25, 1984

IMPACT OF TELEVISED VIOLENCE ON CHILDREN

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Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, I am honored to be invited here today to testify on the impact of television violence on children's attitudes and behavior. I am Dr. John P. Murray, Senior Scientist and Director of Youth and Family Policy for the Boys Town Urban Program. I am the author of numerous books and articles on the topic of television's impact on children. I am here today on behalf of the 72,000 members of the American Psychological Association (APA). While I am testifying on behalf of the APA, it should be noted that the specific data and conclusions presented in my statement are based on research conducted by myself and others and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Association. In my testimony, I will describe some of the major research findings on the impact of televised violence and the implications that can be drawn for both public policy and individual action.

Concern about the potentially harmful effects of viewing televised violence was one of the first issues to surface during the early days of television's history. This week marks the 29th anniversary of the first Congressional hearing on the topic, which was conducted by the Senate Judiciary Committee. In the last 30 years about 900 studies, reports, and commentaries have been published concerning the impact of televised violence, and I believe that we have sufficient information to provide recommendations for public policy.

We have known for some time that television programs include a great deal of violence. Indeed, the results of more than a decade of studies conducted by a research team at the University of Pennsylvania have shown that the average level of violence in prime-time television has remained at about 5

violent acts per hour, while the level of violence in children's Saturday morning programming is much higher, about 20-25 violent acts per hour. The types of violence portrayed on the screen range from destruction of property to physical assaults that cause injury and death.

Of course, the key question is: Does the violence seen on the screen make viewers more aggressive? In my supplementary written submission, I have provided a detailed description of the research findings that address this important question. Therefore, in this testimony I would like to simply highlight some of the important issues.

The first question which needs to be asked is: Are viewers of televised violence more aggressive than other people? On the basis of research evidence, I can conclude that the answer to this question is yes. Children and adults who more frequently watch violent programs tend to hold attitudes and values which favor the use of aggression to resolve conflicts. They also tend to behave more aggressively. That does not necessarily mean that television is the cause of these aggressive attitudes, values, and behaviors. It could be that those who are more aggressive just prefer more violent television programs.

So, the next question that must be asked is: Does televised violence produce aggressive behavior? Here again, the answer seems to be yes. Studies conducted with pre-schoolers, school-age children, college students, and adults confirm that viewing violence on television does lead to increases in aggressive attitudes, values, and behaviors.

Studies showing a clear link between viewing violence and behaving aggressively tend to be conducted in the highly structured settings of university laboratories and research centers, and one might ask

whether findings from the laboratory are applicable to real life circumstances. So, the third question that we need to ask is: What happens in natural settings? Once again, we find that children and adults who watch televised violence more frequently tend to behave more aggressively.

For example, a study conducted by Aletha Huston, when she was a professor at Pennsylvania State University, showed that pre-school children can be influenced by cartoon violence. In this study, the pre-schoolers watched either antisocial, pro-social, or neutral television programs over a four-week period. The antisocial programs consisted of 12 half-hour episodes of Batman and Superman cartoons; the pro-social programs were 12 episodes of Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood; and the neutral programs consisted of children's films which were neither violent nor pro-social. Psychologists observed these pre-schoolers in the natural settings of the classroom or playground over a nine-week period. They found that the youngsters who watched the Batman and Superman cartoons were more likely to hit their playmates, start arguments, disobey the teacher, and be more impatient. On the other hand, the youngsters who had viewed the Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood programs were much more willing to help others, to express concern about others' feelings, to share toys, and play cooperatively.

In other research, William Belson, in a study conducted for CBS, and Leonard Eron and his colleagues at the University of Illinois, in their longitudinal studies, found that viewing televised violence in early childhood was related to children's increased aggressive behavior during their teenage years. In addition, Leonard Eron and his colleagues, continuing their 22-year longitudinal study, have found an impressive relationship between television violence viewing at age 8 and criminal behavior through age 30.

In summary, I believe that the most reasonable statement of our knowledge about the impact of televised violence on children is the principal conclusion contained in a recent report of the National Institute of Mental Health: "The consensus among most of the research community is that violence on television does lead to aggressive behavior by children and teenagers who watch the programs. This conclusion is based on laboratory experiments and on field studies. Not all children become aggressive, of course, but the correlations between violence and aggression are positive. In magnitude, television violence is as strongly correlated with aggressive behavior as any other behavioral variable that has been measured. The research question has been moved from asking whether or not there is an effect to seeking explanations for that effect."

Of course, the final question that must be asked is: What can be done? Here, the proposals are many but the options are few.

In the recent past, the proposals have ranged from establishing a "family viewing period" during the early evening hours in which only programs deemed suitable for family entertainment would be broadcast to calls for boycotts against advertisers who support programs containing high levels of violent action. Both of these proposals have been tried and have led to considerable controversy.

Therefore, I think we must devote our attention to various ways of encouraging broadcasters to increase the pro-social messages in television programs and reduce the level of violence, and alert parents to the potentially harmful effects--especially for children--of viewing televised violence.

Last month, the Attorney General's Task Force on Family Violence issued a report that included suggestions regarding the media. I agree with the Task Force's suggestion that the networks, their affiliates, and the cable stations should be held responsible for reducing and controlling the amount of violence shown on television. However, I believe that parents, educators, and researchers should work with policy makers to encourage television executives and advertisers to reduce television violence and increase pro-social programming.

There are various way to accomplish this task. For example, public hearings such as this serve to remind broadcasters that there is indeed community concern about televised violence. Also, public statements by responsible professional and scientific organizations such as the American Medical Association, the American Academy or Pediatrics, and the American Academy of Child Psychiatry serve to highlight these concerns about the potential harm caused by TV violence and inform the television industry about the serious nature of this problem.

However, I think we also need to encourage parents and teachers to become actively involved in monitoring and discussing the content of programs viewed by children. Similarly, we need to make more effective use of the recently developed curricula designed to enhance children's ability to become discriminating, rather than passive, television consumers.

Legislation has been introduced in Congress that would increase the number of children's programs by providing tax incentives for corporations or imposing legal obligations on networks. I would go a step further and recommend that the emphasis should be on programs that enhance children's emotional and intellectual development.

Finally, one rather innovative approach to this problem of televised violence is a draft piece of legislation, proposed by various concerned groups, which has not yet been introduced in Congress. This suggested legislation, entitled the "Response Time for Violent Promotions Act", proposes an amendment to the Communications Act of 1934, which would essentially require broadcasters to provide time for public service messages that would warn viewers about the potentially harmful effects of viewing televised violence. In this instance, whenever broadcasters transmit three promotional announcements for violent television programs, they must provide one equivalent time period for the transmission of a public service message warning of the dangers of viewing televised violence.

Whether any of these measures, ranging from the proposed legislation to increase parental awareness of the harmful effects of televised violence to public encouragement of self-regulation by the television industry, will succeed remains to be seen. However, I believe that these measures are an important way in which we may begin to solve the problems caused by television violence.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify here today on behalf of the American Psychological Association on the impact of televised violence on children. If I can be of any further assistance to the Subcommittee, please feel free to call upon me.

Could Television Violence Be Good For Children?

Testimony before the U.S. Senate Subcommittee on Juvenile Justice
October 25, 1984

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Mr. Chairman: My daughter, who is now five years old, suffered one of life's little disappointments not long ago when her favorite show, "The Dukes of Hazzard," was cancelled. Her grief evaporated, however, when she discovered and embraced "The A-Team." Why do children, like her, by the tens of millions, seek out action-filled, even violent, television programs. What does the content do to them?

To answer questions like these we first have to distinguish between children's leisure-hours viewing (taking place at the end of the day and on weekends) and their weekday-morning viewing. A child's week is not unlike an adult's week in that weekdays are times when the child's "work," so to speak, goes on--he or she is learning the thousands of things needed to mature into our culture. Several morning television shows--"Captain Kangaroo" (in the past) and "Sesame Street"--oblige this by teaching as they entertain.

However, at the end of the day and on weekends, children are looking for the same things that adults want from the medium--shows that help them rest and repair. A recent and ingenious study by a University of Chicago social scientist has demonstrated that television is indeed the great relaxer for Americans. He outfitted 104 adults with beepers, then had them paged at random times during a week to ascertain

their activity and mood. He reports, "Most notable among the findings is that TV watching is experienced as the most relaxing of all activities." My contention is that children seek and get the same results from their leisure-hours viewing.

The fantasy mayhem on the television screen--sometimes in the form of cartoons, and sometimes not--helps the child to discharge tensions and animosities. The child identifies with the characters and action, and vicariously vents accumulated stress. Although people tend to look back at their own childhoods as carefree times, the truth of the matter is that the socializing of a child is frequently a trial for all involved. It is unavoidable that the child experience some degree of frustration and resentment. Fantasy aggression via television action can be the antidote to the child's real-world pressures and constraints. Just as adults turn to action/adventure shows and football games to discharge some of the mental strains in their lives, so children turn to the explosive shows which they sense will help them maintain psychological balance.

Children learn early in life the difference between what is "just pretend" and what is not, between fantasy and reality, and after the ages of six or seven years infrequently confuse the two. The fantasy violence on their favorite programs very rarely translates into inappropriate or aggressive acts. When we stop to consider the enormity of the audience--nearly 100 percent of American children--and the vast volume of leisure-hours programming they watch, then the amazing fact becomes how relatively little negative influence this exposure produces. The benefits of television fantasy action come virtually without adverse social costs.

These views regarding the benefits of televised fantasy action for children are uncommon among my colleagues in the academic world. Their agenda, I believe, is not to understand why children are drawn to television at the end of the day or the end of the week, but instead to revile a medium which they see as plebian when they want to think of themselves as patricians. My colleagues have generated an enormous amount of research on television's effects over the 30-years history of the medium, the greater bulk of this research supposedly demonstrating the evil effects of viewing. I have elsewhere referred to this literature as "one of the grandest travesties in the uneven history of social science." In my judgment it is consigned to oblivion.

But there is one study which I wish to call to the committee's attention. This study was conducted by Dr. Seymour Feshbach, head of the Psychology Department at the University of California at Los Angeles, and was published in 1971 as the book Television and Aggression. Given the size and rigor of the study, I find it puzzling that it goes unnoticed in the National Institute of Mental Health's recent volume, Television and Behavior, which was edited by David Pearl. Briefly put, Feshbach took several hundred semi-delinquent teenage males who were living in boys' homes, and randomly assigned half of them to a television diet of violent shows, and the other half to non-violent shows. After six weeks of exposure, it was determined that the boys who had been watching violent action/adventure programs were less rowdy than their friends who had been on the non-violent diet. Fantasy violence had reduced real-world violence. I believe this study captures the true role of television fantasy in the lives of the young.

Permit me to summarize my testimony today by quoting from my book, Television Viewers vs. Media Snobs:

> To relax and recover--that is the purpose television serves for children, just as it does for adults. The most striking feature of children's television is not how different it is from adults', but how similar. In both cases the fantasies--which often covertly or overtly deal in aggression--help to reduce the viewers' mental strains by allowing us to indulge in bursts of laughter or vicarious plummeting. Children's minds are very much like ours, and so are their needs.

Thank you for allowing me to testify before this subcommittee.